

Mongolia

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Freedom of the Press

Freedom of speech and of the press is protected under Mongolian law, but the government has an uneven record on respecting these rights in practice. Penalties for defamation are outlined in Mongolia's criminal and civil laws, and criminal defamation charges carry a prison sentence as well as a pecuniary penalty of up to 60 times the national minimum wage. These laws are sometimes used to target journalists, and in 2013, an editor and two journalists from the newspaper *Terguun* faced fines for defamation. The case against them, launched in 2012 by Prime Minister Norovyn Altankhuyag, ended at the Supreme Court in December 2013, where an earlier district court ruling against the three individuals was upheld.

Censorship of public information is banned under the 1998 Media Freedom Law, but a 1995 state secrets law severely limits access to government information, as many archived records have been given classified status, which they can retain for an indefinite amount of time. After an eight-year campaign by activists, the parliament passed the Law on Information Transparency and Right to Information in June 2011, with the legislation taking effect in December 2011.

Numerous additional laws define media freedom and shape the media sector, which is regulated by the Communications Regulatory Commission (CRC). The government routinely monitors broadcast and print media for compliance with restrictions on violent, pornographic, and alcohol-related content. In early 2013, the CRC introduced regulations requiring internet service providers to install software to filter and delete user comments containing slander or threats, as determined by a list of "prohibited words" published by the CRC. The resolution is criticized by freedom of expression groups as a form of inappropriate prior censorship that unjustifiably restricts freedom of expression.

In the run-up to and during the presidential election in June, journalists asserted that the potential threat of defamation suits encouraged self-censorship in media coverage of the vote. The election observer mission of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe noted that because many television stations have ties to political figures, and as the legal framework for campaign coverage is restrictive and often vague, there was limited—and fairly little balanced—coverage of the electoral campaign. Journalists had few opportunities to interact with the candidates, and only one debate was televised.

Although there were no violent attacks on journalists in 2013, media worker often face intimidation and harassment for content that is critical of the government. In Ulaanbaatar, police contribute to censorship in television stations in times of crisis—stations have the option of entering into an agreement by which their employees receive protection during protests in exchange for censoring material that can incite unrest or compromise security.

Print media outlets are common and popular in cities. Although most residents of the country's vast countryside still rely on national public radio for information, access to satellite TV is rapidly increasing. Both state and public media still frequently experience political pressure, and the majority of media outlets are reportedly directly or indirectly owned by political actors, who exert influence on editorial decisions. Exact ownership structures are not publicly known, however, making it difficult to assess the reliability of some media content. A draft law with provisions for increasing ownership transparency was withdrawn from parliamentary discussion in 2013. Mongolians have access to local, privately owned television stations, the English-language broadcasts of the British Broadcasting Corporation and Voice of America on

private FM stations, and, in Ulaanbaatar, foreign television programming via cable and satellite. In 2012, Bloomberg Television launched Bloomberg TV Mongolia, the first international broadcast news organization headquartered in Mongolia, with the intention of delivering international business and finance news alongside coverage of local Mongolian news. The launch of Bloomberg TV Mongolia coincides with a growing trend of more robust and diverse news coverage. Owing to a poor telecommunication infrastructure and widespread poverty, the internet has yet to serve as a significant source of news and information; only about 18 percent of the population accessed the medium in 2013.

Low wages for journalists have created a secondary market for purchasing coverage, and the media sector has yet to produce strong business models to facilitate sustainable growth or independence. Although the growing advertising market in Ulaanbaatar provides an increasingly viable avenue for financial sustainability, the meager market in the provinces often leaves local media outlets dependent on government subsidies and the direct support of political or business figures.

2014 Scores

Press Status

Partly Free

Press Freedom Score

(0 = best, 100 = worst)

37

Legal Environment

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

13

Political Environment

(0 = best, 40 = worst)

12

Economic Environment

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

12